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AUTHOR Takala, Sauli
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ABSTRACT

One of the main aims of the Teaching Content in a Foreign Language (TCFL) program, an in-service teacher training program at the Continuing Education Centre of the University of Jyvaskyla (Finland), was to improve the participants' proficiency in English. To promote this objective, English was made the operating language for the whole program. English was used as the language of instruction and discussion, almost all material was in English, and the participants were encouraged to use English in their informal contacts as well. The principle of "English only" worked well as there was an extensive exposure to spoken and written English. Participants' proficiency was tested at the beginning and end of the program. The proficiency test was based on a nine-point proficiency scale and consisted of listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar sections. A sample diploma of proficiency in teaching in English is appended as well as the overall proficiency rating scale. (CK)

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Sauli Takala
University of Jyväskylä
Institute for Educational Research

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DIPLOMA OF PROFIENCY IN TEACHING IN ENGLISH

One of the main aims of the programme was to improve the participants´ proficiency in English. This was promoted by making English the operating language for the whole programme. English was used as the language of instruction and discussion, almost all material was in English, and the participants were encouraged to use English in their informal contacts as well.

The principle of "English only" worked better than expected. There was an extensive exposure to spoken and written English. This undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the participants clearly felt increasingly more comfortabe in using English. Equally obvious was the fact that, in general, there was a clear improvement in the participants´ proficiency in English. This was also seen in the project reports that the participants wrote on the basis of their classroom research tasks.

In addition to this informal assessment based on continuous observation, the participants´ proficiency was tested at the beginning and at the end of the programme. Data analysis is not finished and, thus, the results will be published at a later date.

During the course of the programme the team responsible for it came to the conclusion that there should be a more formal assessment of proficiency of teaching in a foreign language. This was based on several considerations. Clearly, to be able to do a good job in teaching in a foreign language the teacher needs to have a sufficient command of the language. A reliable test of proficiency would be useful for individual teachers thinking of starting to teach in a foreign language. The test would also be useful for the schools/institutions, which could demonstrate to pupils/students and parents etc. that the involved teaching staff possesses the requisite language proficiency. Furthermore, the test would be useful in the context of the expected increased teacher exchange and in other forms of international contacts in the educational field.

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Drawing on the long and extensive experience in developing proficiency tests for business and industry and for adult education, the team contructed a 4-hour test, which was offered on voluntary basis to the course participants. Twenty teachers took the test.

In line with recent developments in testing, the test was based on a 9-point proficiency scale. The test consisted of the following parts: (i) Listening comprehension, which was based on a taped discussion on educational matters. The first part was heard twice and the second part only once. The test takers had to write brief summaries of answers to interview questions and brief answers to questions that were based on the contents of the tape. (ii) Speaking test, which was partly taken individually in a language laboratory and partly done as a group discussion. The lab task consisted of brief situational descriptions in Finnish/Swedish and the test taker had to respond in English in an appropriate manner. For the videotaped group discussion, the test takers had received a few days beforehand a topic that they were required to deal with in a brief presentation of 4-5 minutes. The other members of the group were expected to make questions and give comments. The language laboratory session lasted about one hour and 20 minutes altogether. The videotaped group discussion lasted about half an hour. (iii) Reading test, which consisted of four relatively short passages. Test takers had to write a summary in Finnish or Swedish and answer a number of brief questions based on the texts. The testing times was about one hour. (iv) Writing test, in which the participants had to write two formal letters related to their professional contexts. The test takers could take about 40 minutes for completing this test. (v) Vocabulary and grammar test, which consisted a close test of grammar, a list of 40 randomly selected English words to be translated into Finnish or Swedish, and a brief passage in Finnish/ Swedish to translate into English. About one hour was allowed for this test.

The test was marked by three raters and the participants received a certificate. (Appendix 1 & 2). The Jyväskylä team intends to offer the test to all teachers interested and make it a recognized test in the national and international contexts.

APPENDIX 1

Diploma of Proficiency in Teaching in English

***Name** has taken the Diploma of Proficiency in Teaching in English examination on date. On the basis of a battery of oral and written tests, her proficiency has been assessed on a scale of 1-9.*

Overall Proficiency Rating 7

Listening 8	*Speaking 7*
Reading 8	*Writing 7*
Grammar 6	*Vocabulary 7*

*This overall proficiency rating shows that **Name** has a very good command of English.*

On this level of proficiency a person can be expected to manage a wide variety of teaching situations of varying complexity in English. This level also suggests that a person can be expected to function adequately in a range of professional English language situations such as working as an English-medium teacher in other countries.

Date

Signatures

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The person who has taken the Diploma of Proficiency in Teaching in English examination has participated in a battery of tests which have examined his/her knowledge of oral and written English. Assessment has focussed on the communicative effectiveness and appropriacy of language as well as linguistic accuracy.

OVERALL PROFICIENCY RATING SCALE

Level 9 Has a full command of the language: flawless, fluent, appropriate and well organised use of language. An exceptional level of language proficiency, which is normally attained only by well-educated language professionals.

Level 8 Communicates effectively and appropriately even in demanding oral and written tasks and situations. Fluent and in many ways native-like. Occasional problems with subtle stylistic distinctions and idioms.

Level 7 Communicates effectively and appropriately even in many demanding oral and written tasks and situations. Usage is quite versatile and fluent with some trace of the mother tongue. Understands with ease both general and professional/occupational language.

Level 6 Communicates appropriately in familiar oral and written tasks and situations related to work and free time. Language knowledge seldom hinders effective communication. Occasional inaccuracies and inadequacies which nevertheless seldom lead to misunderstandings. Mother tongue interference is in evidence but not intrusive. Rarely has problems understanding general or professional/occupational language.

Level 5 Communicates well in familiar oral and written tasks and situations related to work and freetime. Makes an effort to be an effective communicator. Inaccuracies cause some misunderstandings and language is not always quite fluent or appropriate. Interference from mother tongue or other languages is evident. Understands ordinary spoken and written text and there is only occasional need for repetition or consulting a dictionary.

Level 4 Communicates fairly well on familiar tasks and situations; effective communication may sometimes be hindered by problems with language. Can handle routine writing tasks related to work and free time. Interference from L1/other languages quite obvious. Vocabulary, grammar and fluency generally adequate, but speaking or writing may reveal specific strengths or weaknesses.

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Level 3 Manages to communicate in the most familiar oral and written tasks and situations but new situations cause communication problems. Understands slow and careful speech and can normally understand the gist of an easy text.

Level 2 Manages to communicate in simple and routine tasks and situations. With the help of a dictionary can understand simple written messages but can get the gist without one. Limited language proficiency causes frequent breakdowns and misunderstandings in non-routine situations.

Level 1 Knowledge of language suffices to be able to cope with the simplest oral and written tasks and situations. Can understand the topic in newspaper articles and conversations that deal with familiar subjects. Knows some of the basic structures of the language.